DON ESTEVAN'S HONOR.*

By Eleanor M. Ingram.

It was held in keeping by a viking of the South and by another whom he brought over the sea.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

ESTEVAN DE LUCENA, cousin of Luís de Lucena, ruler of the island kingdom of Rocaverde, is left in command by the latter. Treason is discovered, but only one of the plotters, Gonsalvo by name, is apprehended. The ships come in, and Luís is informed of the matter by Estevan. That night Estevan is entrapped by one Mirando in a room where are assembled all the other conspirators, and is told of a dastardly plot to kill his cousin. Realizing the futility of resistance, he promises, on condition that Luís's life be spared, to shield the officers, who have had enough of plotting, and to release Gonsalvo. Luís, in anger, orders him into exile in the Quinta, on the other side of the island. Estevan's sister, Arria, lately returned from a convent, pleads in vain to go to him; Luís, unable to bear with the situation, puts to sea again.

A strange ship comes in, and from it lands a beautiful girl, Floria Mendez y del Carpio, whose father, a Castilian noble, has gone on an expedition with Don Luís, sending her to Rocaverde until his return. Floria and Arria stray by chance into Estevan's old rooms, and are there discovered by Mirando. Juan Perez, a little boy of the village, tells Floria a great deal about this hero, Don Estevan, awakening her interest. Lucena returns, and one day Arria comes upon him as he is kissing Floria's hand. She cannot hide the fact that she cares, and the viking of the South folds her in a rapt embrace. But she refuses to marry him until he shall have set Estevan free, and this he will not do. The ships set sail again.

With Lucena's permission, Floria has gone to stay with the maiden sisters of Ruy de la Vega, in the vicinity of the Quinta. She is lost in the forest, and meets Estevan. Later, she encounters his faithful servant, Leone Valdi. Pedro Mirando is seen by Juan Perez as he is going to the forest. Juan tells Floria, who receives a visit from Arria. Seeing that Estevan will not speak, Floria bravely declares her love for him. The lovers part, not knowing what of joy and sorrow the future holds for both.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE END OF A TRAITOR.

THE strange calm of the night remained unchanged by the new day. Not a ripple dimpled the sea; not a leaf moved on Rocaverde. Floria, coming out and surveying the shining water, shaded her eyes from its glare.

"The Mediterranean has changed to Abderaman's fountain of quicksilver," she commented whimsically.

Some one rose swiftly from one of the courtyard benches and crossed to her side.

"*Señorita,*" said Juan.

Floria turned, with an exclamation of surprise.

"*You,* Juanito? You have come back so early?"

"I did not go home," he retorted accusingly. "*Señorita,* I saw you last night with *El Sonriente.* You love him —*him!*"

Floria's clear eyes met his without shrinking, although the carnation deepened on cheek and lip.

"You knew that already, before I myself," she answered.

"Never!" he denied hotly. "Never, *señorita!* I thought it was my lord. I thought you would win Don Estevan's life from him; now there is nothing—no way to look. And you—"

Floria regarded the round boyish face in its new fatigue and distress, her own expression full of wondering pity.

"Juan, there is no danger to Don Estevan—no menace but that which grows less each day. What do you fear?"

His answer was indirect.

"*Señorita—señorita,* what stones are you building in your palace? You warned me; will you give yourself to one who has forgotten all that should be remembered?"

"No, but to one whose honor has led him in paths we cannot see," she replied proudly. "I trust Don Estevan."

"You mean that he can explain? He has told you—"

"Nothing; I did not ask. Juanito, do not scold me. I am too happy this morning."

"*Señorita!* Happy? Look."

She followed the direction of his outstretched hand, and saw four threadlike lines that rose dark where glistening sky and water met. Juan answered her inquiring glance, his voice a little lowered.

"The ships, *señorita.* My lord is coming home."

"You are afraid?" asked Floria seriously. "Why, now — after so long? What do you dread from Don Luís, Juan?"

He raised his dark face to hers, and found no reply.

"While the calm lasts, they cannot come in," he said presently.

They stood in silence until Floria was called to the house.

When she returned, half an hour later, Juan was sitting on the bench, his chin in his hands.

"You will not follow me?" she said, between entreaty and command.

"It would be better not to go,"- he answered dully. "But I will wait, *señorita.*"

Under the dense trees it was cool, and the sun fell only in checkered patches. Floria touched the drooping branches caressingly as she passed, loving the least flower of this Rocaverde where she had found Estevan.

"I know now what Selim felt when he saw Alenya of the Sea," she reflected. "Only I was not sorrowful. I could tell Don Luís that story better now."

The foreboding felt by Estevan and Juan affected her not at all; indeed, of the first she was hardly conscious, so well had her lover obeyed her wish for one untroubled night. And she had youth's incredulity of grief, with a profound faith in Lucena's ultimate release of his cousin.

But when she reached the pool in the forest, Estevan was not there. Surprised and puzzled, she gazed down the avenues of trees. That it was still early was an explanation that did not satisfy; she knew quite well that he would not have permitted her to wait for him.

She stood for a moment, listening for his step, and suddenly caught the sound of distant voices. After a brief hesitation, she turned in that direction.

The subdued murmur grew more distinct as she advanced, and an abrupt turn to avoid some bushes brought her to a standstill, her eyes dilating. At her feet the ground fell away in one of those deep chasms with which the mountainside abounded; and on the opposite side, not twenty-five feet from her, were Estevan and Pedro Mirando.

Neither had heard her light footfall, and Floria drew back among the trees, with instinctive avoidance of the stranger's hard, angry eyes. Mirando was speaking excitedly; Estevan listened, his fair, tranquil face thrown into high relief by the dark richness of his dress, and by the still darker background of the huge tree-trunk against which he leaned.

"*Señor,* I tell you, his ships are at this moment in sight," the other insisted. "Will you stay here until he carries out the plan that has been growing, all these months, in his deliberate, unforgetting hate? Will you wait for that?"

"I answered that question once," Estevan replied. "This is my hour, Señor Mirando; it is a great pleasure to me to see your agitation."

"You mean to tell him—"

"You have my promise."

"Then you are defenseless?"

"Yes. But that does not seem to console you."

Mirando hesitated.

"*Señor,* is life to be so carelessly tossed away—the life that holds youth and strength, fame and wealth? Grant the gates of Europe closed—as they are not—are there not other countries? Five years ago, when you delivered my lord

from his prison in Fez, I fought under you."

"You were a good officer then, Mirando."

"*Señor,* I would serve you as well again, if you chose. I knew—all the men knew, and half Morocco—that the Sultan offered everything to induce you to stay with him and govern his city, after all was over. You refused, but I know the Sultan gave you a written promise that the offer was still yours, on any day you might come to claim it. *Señor,* that is a life that even a Lucena might stoop to gather—life in the city of palaces — life gorgeous, many tinted, quivering with the excitement and passion of Africa. It would be a command almost absolute, in the land where days and nights are streaked with fire. Would war be less war because your soldiers shouted '*Allah!*' instead of '*Santiago!*' —because the banner that followed your orders did not bear my lord's crested wave pierced with the golden sword?"

"You are poetic, Señor Mirando. Unfortunately, I can listen no longer; even a prisoner's time is sometimes of importance."

The man met the ironic smile, and his expression changed.

"You refuse, *señor?*"

"Did you imagine I should do anything else?" inquired Estevan.

"Then give *me* the paper, and *I* will go!" exclaimed Mirando. "*Señor,* give me the Sultan's letter, and I leave you free to tell my lord all! I would have escaped from this island long ago; but I have lived in this way too many years to go forth a beggar, a soldier of fortune. I will be frank, Don Estevan. If I could have found the paper in your rooms—and I have searched—my lord would have seen me no more. Give me Fez in exchange for Rocaverde—send me to the Sultan with your recommendation—and I give you back your promise!"

Only dimly comprehending the significance of the offer, Floria yet guessed enough to wait breathlessly for Estevan's answer. But the young noble remained unmoved before the eager attack.

"You deepen my veneration for you, Señor Mirando," he said, with perfect calmness. "You would save yourself at the expense of your companions, then? You forget that you were only one of the men to whom I gave my word; bring me the others; and if you are all agreed, I will gladly buy my liberty. If that is all you have to say, I suggest that you return to the castle."

The bitter disappointment that filled Mirando's narrow eyes was accompanied by something more dangerous.

"You refuse peace, *señor?*" he replied, struggling with his rage. "Suppose the old threat still holds—suppose death watches for my lord now, as before?"

"I suppose nothing so absurd," Estevan retorted. "I am not a helpless captive this time; and if there is new treachery, I am not forced to conceal it. Don Luís shall be warned as he steps on the wharf, though I do it myself. And have no doubt but that he will believe me, Señor Mirando."

Mirando's flush died out.

"So, Don Estevan—and there is no one you care to protect, except my lord?" he demanded.

"Which means—"

"Which means that the choice is before you again, *señor.* The dark-eyed Castilian who visits you here in the forest—has *she* nothing to lose? Either go yourself to Fez, or send me to the Sultan before the calm-bound ships come in. If not, Doña Floria's romantic adventure will be the gossip of castle and village."

Floria sank against the nearest tree, her horrified eyes on Estevan—Estevan, whose face grew strangely cool and still.

"No," he said, in a voice of silk and gold. "No; you will not do that, Señor Mirando—because I am going to kill you."

The man stared at him, then cast a rapid glance around; but Estevan was before him, and the precipice behind. Floria understood, and put her hands over her eyes, shuddering.

When she looked up the two men were fighting—the slipping of steel over steel the only sound. And for the first time she saw *El Sonriente* glad with the brilliant gaiety, the joy of action and daring, the zest of the only game. This was the Estevan whom Lucena and Juan had known.

The duel progressed in silence, the swaying grace of the combatants masking the deadliness of their intent. It was difficult to realize that each silvery tinkle of steel marked the stopping of an attempted death. But slowly the laughter deepened in the blue eyes, and the black grew fiercely malevolent.

"If Don Luís wills," murmured Estevan softly; "but *you* precede me, dear *señor*."

Mirando had no time for speech; it was a defense and not a battle now. Trembling with horror and pity, Floria had already veiled her eyes, when something sprang rustling through the underbrush toward the two men. Estevan caught the noise, and called out sharply.

"Down, Taric! Down! Down!"

The dog crouched, growling; but for the single instant Estevan's eyes left those of his opponent. Mirando's cry of triumph mingled with Floria's scream, and as Estevan fell the great hound leaped. Mirando saw—too late—and man and dog toppled backward together over the forgotten precipice.

The stillness that succeeded was absolute. Tearless, voiceless, Floria turned and sped back to where the chasm ended in the mountain's slope. The bushes grasped at her with detaining fingers; trailing vines rose, netlike, under her flying feet; once a vivid snake glided aside unheeded.

Estevan was unconscious when she reached his side, the spreading stain over his heart dying the silk and velvet with a sinister crimson. In passing the little brook, Floria had dipped her scarf; and now she knelt and pressed the cool wet gauze to his temples, pushing back the thick waves of fair hair with gentle fingers. But, as the simple efforts failed one by one, her self-control deserted her.

"Estevan! Estevan!" she cried, breaking into a passion of sobs. "I am afraid, I am afraid!"

She bent her head until her cheek touched his.

"Estevan! Estevan!" she repeated, not knowing that she spoke at all.

The appeal in the beloved voice—the insistent call—dragged back the reluctant consciousness from its repose. Very slowly Estevan's lashes were lifted, and he looked into Floria's wet eyes.

"Dear—" he murmured with infinite tenderness and pity.

Floria gave a low cry, and joy flashed into her face with a radiance of visible light, sweeping back the beauty of color and tint.

"I thought you were dead!" she exclaimed tremulously.

The sorrow deepened in his earnest eyes.

"That were best, dear love," he said.

"Estevan!" she protested, in shocked reproach.

"Aye, best. Floria, you do not know. I thought of it all—last night." He spoke in little pauses, his dark brows contracting painfully. "Dear, I have been very selfish. Mirando—"

"Taric carried him down the cliff," she answered, shivering.

"I know. But he was right; you must go before any one finds you here. Never let them suspect you have met me. Go, before the ships come in, Floria!"

"And leave you alone?"

"Alone—is that new? Floria, Floria, how I have wanted Don Luís!"

The involuntary cry startled them both. Before its revelation of suffering, Floria found no words; to Estevan it brought realization of his ebbing strength.

"Leone will find me," he added, almost at once. "I ask you to go—Floria *mia!*"

"I cannot," she said, in distress. "Estevan, do not send me away. I am coming to the Quinta to take care of you. If we are together—if you live—does it matter what people say?"

With difficulty he turned his head and kissed the small hand on his shoulder.

"Dear, you have brought me a happiness that makes all else easy; leave it to me, free from the grief of having injured you."

Still she hesitated, and he continued gently:

"There is no one in Rocaverde who would obey a wish of mine. Will you, too, refuse me?"

The tears rushed to Floria's eyes. Stooping, she touched her lips to his; then rose and fled across the forest.

With her swift movement, a knot of rose-colored ribbon fluttered from her

dress and settled lightly on the ground. Estevan, gazing after her, saw the gleam of color, and forced back the creeping faintness. If some one came before Leone, or if he did not notice the telltale bit of silk, would there not be a question of who wore such things here?

Slowly, with painful effort and exertion, he dragged himself toward the rosy spot that wavered before his eyes and seemed to retreat as he advanced.

When at last Leone Valdi and two servants arrived from the Quinta, they found Estevan lying in a heavy stupor, his right hand outstretched, and so tightly clenched that they could not discover what it held.

CHAPTER XXII.

JUAN GOES FOR AID.

STILL sitting, chin in hand, Juan watched the slight figure coming up the slope from the forest; then turned to look at the spider-web tracery of spars against the sun. He shared Valdi's lack of faith in Lucena's consideration for his own class and blood, and he firmly believed that the tortoise-like ships brought Estevan's sentence.

"When my lord waits!" he repeated, with ominous recollection; and forgot to move, until Floria's step sounded beside him.

If he did not cry out on seeing her, it was because his stupefaction passed such expression. The soft, dark eyes were black with strong feeling; her delicate face bore an unfamiliar wanness, an incredulous pain and grief. As she let fall the gathered folds of her dress, he saw it was stained and torn by brambles; and the little shoes showed signs of heedless walking in the woods.

"*Señorita!*" he gasped.

She looked at him steadfastly.

"You will go to the castle, Juan," she directed clearly; "and tell Don Ruy de la Vega that Don Estevan is wounded and must have aid at once! Tell also Doña Soledad, and Doña Arria."

"*Señorita*—"

"And to the last say also that I am Don Estevan's promised wife; and that I ask them to come to the Quinta, so that I may be with dignity at his side. He has bidden me stay here; without them, I cannot go."

"*Señorita!* What has happened?"

"Mirando tried to kill him. They fought together. Juan, it is too long to tell you—go!"

He caught her hand and gently drew her down on the bench, his own eyes blazing with excitement.

"*Senorita! Por Dios!* You are ill—you have not thought! Where is Mirando?"

"He is dead. Taric bore him over the precipice when Don Estevan was wounded. There is no one to care for him at the Quinta, Juan. Go now!"

"To carry that message? *Señorita,* I dare not."

"Then I will go myself."

"Oh!"

They looked at each other, and the boy yielded first.

"I will go—I will go. But Don Estevan is disgraced, outlawed; you will not call yourself his. *Señorita,* think what it means to you. I will bring help, but do you keep silence. And if it ends now, he will escape my lord, at least."

"If Don Estevan lives, I will go to him; if he does not, I will enter the convent," she answered wearily. "Juan, do not think of me; only go. There is nothing to fear. When Don Luís comes it will not be you he will consider."

Juan flushed all over.

"I am not afraid," he protested hotly. "*Señorita,* I am coming back. I can help you; I will bring news from the Quinta. I—I love you, *señorita.*"

He touched her hand and turned to the long, glaring road.

After a while, Floria rose and went to her room. She had herself found Valdi and sent him to Estevan's aid; there was nothing to do now but wait for Juan's return.

The place seemed strangely empty of all that had filled it the evening before. With the moonlight had vanished the things which, scarcely more substantial, yet left the reality dull and faded without them. Through the window the sunlight streamed, hard, and intolerably bright; by it Floria lingered a moment,

gazing earnestly and wistfully at the unmoving lines that marked Lucena's ships against the horizon.

The hours passed with clinging reluctance; the long day seemed to grudge each minute that slipped from its grasp. Once the Señora Paz came up to her guest, and was dismayed into bustling care of her. Floria submitted without objection, and dismissed her as soon as possible, under pretext of wishing to sleep. But when she closed her eyes it was only to meet Estevan's caressing glance, or to see Mirando's face as the ground gave way under his heel.

It was night when Juan came back, tired and pale beneath the dust of the sun-baked roads. In the dusky room Floria rose to receive him, her white robes making her distinct among the shadows.

"Juan?"

"I told them," he said, standing grimly before her. "And they will do nothing until my lord is here. *Nothing, señorita!* I even went to the Arab doctor himself, an aged pagan whom Don Estevan saved from a sinking ship and brought here to live in peace, and he was afraid to come. My lord forbade that any one should visit the Quinta. *Madre de Dios!* The *señoras*—Doña Arria sat untroubled, and looked at me from Don Estevan's eyes; Doña Soledad said my lord should bring you prisoner to the castle until your father came. *Señorita,* I hate every one in the world but you!"

"And Don Luís," answered Floria, with the quietness of exhaustion. "Juan, pray that he come in time."

"*Señorita,* you believe he will help—"

"I know it. What they are doing at the castle he will never forgive."

Juan strove to see her face through the darkness, convinced, in spite of his prejudice against Lucena.

"Perhaps. He loved him, *señorita.* But there is no wind."

They turned together and gazed at the unruffled sea, on whose smooth surface the stars began to cast tiny paths of light.

"I will go to the Quinta," he added presently. "In the morning I will bring you news, *señorita.* It may be good news; remember, we do not know."

"Yes, I will remember that," she responded simply. "You are very kind to me, Juan."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE KINDLY CHURCH DOES OFFICE.

As the day had dragged its minutes into hours, so did the night. Floria, kneeling at the open window, fell asleep at last with her arms resting on the broad sill. The placid household had long retired.

The jingling of little bells broke in upon her uneasy slumber and startled her alertly awake. The moon had risen hours since, and in the bright light she saw a solitary rider coming up the road. Floria leaned forward, recognizing the figure with incredulous joy, then sprang up and sped noiselessly through the house and out of the door.

The rider had stopped his steed for a brief recuperation from the steep ascent, and the young girl reached him easily.

"Padre Jacinto!" she panted. "You are going to him?"

"My child, my child!" the good *padre* remonstrated helplessly, as she leaned against him and hid her eyes on his knee. "My dear, hush! You distress me."

"I am not crying now. You are going there, *padre?*"

He laid his hand on the soft dark curls.

"My child, it is not for me—nor, indeed, for those in the castle—to judge Don Estevan. I have some skill in such cases as his, and I go to give what aid I can."

"Take me with you, *padre mio!*"

"Floria!"

She lifted her sweet, resolute face to him.

"*Padre,* we met each other, Estevan and I; could we help caring? I am to be his wife—take me to him. All Rocaverde has heard already; and if I am with you, it cannot be wrong."

Padre Jacinto was wise in experience, and he knew Estevan de Lucena.

"Did Don Estevan wish you to go to the Quinta?" he asked.

"No," confessed Floria truthfully.

"But he thinks only of protecting me, not of himself. He wanted me to keep silence altogether—to leave him there in the forest until Leone Valdi chanced to find him. Could I have done that? And now I cannot do this other—to stay here while he is suffering, perhaps while he is asking for me. *Padre,* suppose even that I should never hear his voice again!"

"My child, let us trust it is not so grave as that," he answered, his own voice ill assured. "We must first think of Don Estevan; would it be well for him to learn that you were in the Quinta? You say rightly, it is of you he will ask—it is you he will strive to shield; leave me the power to tell him you are in safety. For the rest"—he hesitated, but the large, appealing eyes drew him on—"if you will remain here, daughter, I will promise to send for you, if Don Estevan asks it, or if he grows dangerously worse."

"If he had done as Mirando urged we might have been together in Fez," she said, with dreamy irrelevance. "I thought I wanted him to wait; but now all else would matter so little if he were well."

Padre Jacinto contemplated her with some misgiving.

"Floria, you must go in and try to rest. You will do as Don Estevan and I wish—you will wait here?"

"If I must—until Don Luís comes," she yielded. "And if you promise, *padre.*"

He climbed down from his mule to lead her back to the door, reiterating assurances and encouragement. Floria reascended the stairs, a little comforted. There was something soothing in the very jingle of the mule-bells, as the sound died away in the forest paths. But when she obeyed the injunction to rest, it was by taking her post at the window once more; and when sleep again overtook her, the last waking glance was toward Lucena's fleet.

That way also were turned the first glances of Rocaverde, next morning, as the red sun rolled up. From Ruy de la Vega, on the castle ramparts, to Emilia Diaz, in her cottage—all looked toward the tracery of masts and spars; then up at the mountain which lifted its barrier between them and the Quinta. For the first time in many months, Estevan's name passed from mouth to mouth, and not unkindly. It helped him that Pedro Mirando had been disliked.

But Rosa Paredes voiced the general feeling in a criticism that contained all the insolence of youth and assured beauty, as she stood beside the fountain in the village square.

"So you are unreasonable, you of Rocaverde," she announced in her caustic drawl, poising, hands on hips, with lithe gipsy grace. "If my lord had come home and sentenced Don Estevan to death, you would all have said: 'It is well! *Viva la justicia del señor.*' But because he is dying over there—because it was a duel—you are all pity. Bah! I will marry a sailor."

Rocaverde flushed shamefacedly and tried to laugh, not finding a denial. Be it said to the credit of the island that no rough word was spoken of Floria, even the cynical Rosa having only admiration for the young Castilian who dared so much for Lucena's prisoner. And with delicious perversity, they were bitterly angry with Juan Perez, as a Rocaverdean who supported one who had betrayed his lord.

Still, the calm remained unbroken, and more than ever the sea deserved the fanciful comparison with the Spanish Moor's pool of quicksilver. Early in the morning, before the sun had risen high enough to make travel unendurable, a small cavalcade left the castle and commenced the ascent of the mountain. Seeing a woman's fluttering garments, the village stared in speculative interest.

Floria heard the arrival of the visitors, as she heard every sound that came from house or forest. There had even been seconds when she fancied she could hear the wavering tide lap against the distant ships it failed to move. But she did not go down to meet Arria, standing quietly in the middle of the room.

Arria de Lucena was not easily disconcerted, but something in the attitude of the silent figure halted her on the threshold.

"Floria!" she exclaimed.

Floria said nothing; and Arria's unusual flush rose, as she found herself on trial where she had come as judge.

"You are angry," she said, with her cold frankness. "Why? Do you imagine I have not tried to send aid to Estevan, and failed—that I am not as powerless as you? Is it my fault that they are all cowards down there?"

"Then, you do care?" Floria asked gravely.

"Naturally. From the first, have I neglected any effort to save Estevan—have I not even sent away Don Luís because of him?"

Floria moved a quick step forward, swept by the last sentence into a sympathy measured by her own desolation.

"Forgive me!" she said, the shadow of a sob crossing her face. "I did not remember."

They kissed each other, then sat down, hand in hand. Floria leaned her head against the high back of her chair, with a sigh of utter weariness; anxiety had given her a pathetic fragility that accentuated her real youth. Arria studied her, with guilty realization of her own mingled thoughts—thoughts which she dared not quite disentangle.

"Juan told me what Doña Soledad said," Floria remarked, after a pause. "I did not expect you to come to me, Arria."

"It is not you I blame," answered Arria, deliberately. "Nor is it you Don Luís will reproach, when he learns that Estevan has drawn you into his disgrace. You are starting to his defense, of course; you will hear no wrong of him; but he should have guarded you from this, Floria."

"Arria, what you believe is not so," declared Floria, putting her small, cold hand over the one she clasped. "Not only of me—although there, too, you wrong him; for I made him speak—but of that other. Estevan was never untrue to his cousin. I heard Mirando talking with him before they fought; though I could not understand all, it was Mirando who was afraid—Mirando who dreaded Don Luís. He wanted Estevan to keep some secret."

"What secret?" demanded Arria.

"I could not tell; something of the plot which did not succeed. But it was Mirando who threatened Don Luís."

"Yes; since the duel, it is not difficult to guess that Mirando was one of the men Don Luís sought. Floria, can you not see how this convicts, not clears, Estevan? Naturally, Mirando was afraid his share in the plan would be discovered; Estevan has nothing more to fear, since he confessed."

Floria had never heard a true account of the scene that followed Gonsalvo's escape, and she was not able to deny Estevan's confession or limit its extent, but the faith in her soft eyes remained unshaken.

"I said I did not understand; I only know that Estevan could not have done that thing."

"Did he tell you so?"

Floria hesitated, struggling for exact recollection.

"He said he would not tell me he was guilty, and that he would never defend himself."

Arria smiled, between pity and scorn.

"It cost so little to convince you? Floria, Don Luís asked him only to say he was innocent—asked no proofs, no explanation—and Estevan could not. Oh, I, too, tried to refuse belief—until it was forced upon me!"

Floria drew away from her, shivering.

"If you are trying now to make me believe that story, you will fail," she replied firmly. "I am tired. It is hard to think; but when Don Luís comes, perhaps *he* will understand. Arria, did you come here to take me to Estevan?"

"No," retorted Arria.

"Then—"

"You want me to go. It was you I came to see; for no other reason would I have left the castle, at this time. Doña Soledad and I have quarreled over this visit; she is grieved for Estevan and shocked for you; I never felt less kindly toward him, and your courage is past all admiration. You have dared all I cannot. When Estevan is well, I believe you will go to him at the Quinta; *I* would not marry Don Luís, at the castle, while one whispering voice could attack me. You—whom I called a child, with your guitar and pretty tales!"

Surprised and half frightened, Floria looked at the lovely, stormy face.

"You think unkindly only of Estevan," she said. "What I have done—what you call courage—is not so; because nothing matters except him."

"And you cannot pardon me for remaining away from him. Remember that Don Luís is out there—that he told me directly that I should not go to the Quinta—and ask yourself whether it would help Estevan for his cousin to meet that added contradiction!"

As before, Floria interpreted Arria's emotions by her own, and gave her impulsive sympathy.

"It is true. I should be selfish to lead you there, to make you risk angering your betrothed. Surely you know Estevan and I want you to be happy, Arria, however it may be with us. Go back to the castle. Padre Jacinto is at the Quinta, and has promised to send me news of him."

Again Arria colored before the clear, earnest eyes. Lucena had awakened one side of her nature into fierce response to his, and now Floria's soft touch reached a dormant gentleness.

"I should like to help you," she answered, groping uncertainly for expression.

Floria had the poet's gift of ready comprehension, a magical insight that is only another form of sympathy; she understood, now, and smiled a little unsteadily.

"There is no one who can help, save Don Luís. We can only wait. But I thank you for coming to me, Arria."

They had both risen. Drawing the slight figure to her, Arria turned a long gaze on the ships. And never before had the violet eyes been so like Estevan's.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ROSA PAREDES DECIDES.

If from the island the motionless ships appeared cruelly placid and indifferent, from the decks Rocaverde offered a vision of aggravating coolness and tranquillity. Between blazing sky and ocean, the ships were held in a heat that made the exposed quarters impossible and the interior scarcely better. The men had borne it with the indifference of health and success; but it was now the third day since the calm had anchored them in sight of home, and the restraint began to pass endurance.

On the Gaviota, they lay upon the decks in such shadow as they could find; even Lucena's discipline was temporarily relaxed. The honor of forming one of his crew was eagerly sought; but, like many other honors, it was uneasily worn when attained.

In one corner a group were engaged in gambling away their lately won share of the cargo which made the Gaviota a veritable treasure-ship; in another spot of shade, half a dozen laughing faces bent over a miniature race-track, down which a pair of beetles ambled with charming slowness and obliquity. Francisco Diaz, his merry, audacious face tanned dark as the Moors he had recently fought, sat on an upturned bucket, and enlivened the monotony with his inseparable and primitive mandolin.

"Five leagues and more from Granada
Heaves a bold bark upon the sea;
Good gold for many a man, ha-ha!
And a Moorish trinket or two for me!"

"If Emilia heard that, she would say a crow had stolen your voice, Diaz!" jeered one of the gamblers. "Sixes, Manuel; you have lost the earrings!"

"It is the heat," returned Diaz imperturbably. "I am thinking of the cool, full casks in my wife's new storeroom.

"White wine! Red wine! White wine!
Red wine!
Faith, I could drink it all!"

"A little louder, Francisco—only a little, and my lord will hear you!" suggested another.

"And then your heart will break to see me in trouble, my Felipe," he retorted, lowering his tone, however. "Tell me, what did Rosa Paredes say when you kissed her for good-by?"

A broad smile went round the circle.

"Felipe will say a Moor gave him that scratch," observed the young sailor who had danced with the girl on the evening before the voyage.

"The kiss was worth it; who else has had so much?" answered the recipient provocatively.

The eyes of the two rivals met with a significant glint, and Felipe half rose from his lounging position.

"*Hola!*" exclaimed Diaz warningly. "*Señores,* are we ashore?"

"If you do not know the answer to that, Francisco, the rest of us can tell you," some one called dryly.

Diaz tilted his head against the rail. "I know, I know; it is only at sea that I have to look at you every day, Valentino. Do you remember the affair when an unkind pagan cut off this cavalier's ear, gentlemen? *Santa Maria!* Valentino roared like an Atlantic gale —and how he fought, that day! It seemed there would not be enough Moors in all Andalusia to satisfy his thirst for killing. The infidels might fill a book with the account of payments made on that ear. Is it settled yet, my son?"

"When I listen to you, I could wish the Moor had lopped off both ears, Francisco," growled the other good-temperedly.

This time the laughter rang out heartily, Diaz joining in at his own expense.

"Forgive the pagan, Valentino; never could you have made such a jest without him!" he declared. "When I reflect that we never considered you witty! This heat—one suffocates! Once before we were becalmed like this—out beyond the great rock, on my first voyage. What was that song you taught me?

"Oh, the sun never sets in the east,
dear heart!
Farewell, for the dawn is gone!
Farewell! From me to my absent one—"

One of the men caught his arm savagely.

"Diaz! Where are you dreaming? To sing that—*here!*"

A silence of absolute consternation had fallen upon the groups, as they stared from the singer to the door beyond. After a long moment, Diaz laid the mandolin on the deck and rose, a little less ruddy than before.

"He did not hear," he said, glancing around for confirmation.

Felipe shrugged his shoulders expressively, and returned to the beetles.

But Lucena had heard, and the stifling luxury of the cabin where he sat gave place to the dark, wet decks. The rush of wind through the cordage, the hiss of parting waves, came with the song; and in a halo of yellow lantern-light, a fair, laughing face bent above the wheel. It had been so like Estevan to choose that sentimental ballad for moments of especial stress, when only Lucena or he dared guide the reeling Gaviota, or when the battle wavered between defeat and victory.

But the illusion faded as quickly as it had come, and the cabin closed in again—the cabin whose gem-like gorgeousness had never been the work of the ascetic Lucena, and which was stamped with the marks of dual occupation, from its twin divans to the jade and ivory chessmen on the high-rimmed shelf.

Lucena knew quite well that only forgetfulness would have brought that song within his hearing; knew, also, the reason for the sudden break and hush; and his pride winced before the certainty that these others divined what passed here in his solitude. He turned and gazed through the oval window at Rocaverde, a soft emerald cone against the bright sea. Estevan's heaviest hours were less difficult than those which came to Lucena, for he understood.

By and by there was a movement outside, a murmur of excitement that reached even the cabin. From one of the other ships came a ringing shout. Rapid footsteps crossed the passage, and some one knocked. Lucena gave the desired permission curtly; he was sufficiently weary and irritable to dislike the officer who attended, merely because he took Estevan's place.

But the man who appeared on the threshold was too overjoyed for close observation.

"My lord, a breeze is coming; the calm has broken!" he announced breathlessly.

"You fancied it eternal?" inquired Lucena, rising composedly. "Pray open the door, Mendoza."

The officer obeyed, and followed quietly, watching his chief with the relieved reflection that in a few hours he would no longer be under the direct surveillance of those gray eyes.

To-day, not even Lucena's presence could lessen the joyous abandon with

which the men flung themselves into the preparations to meet the dark line which came sweeping steadily down toward them. They were going home; and they worked cheerfully under the heat which an hour before they had found intolerable in their shaded corners. Diaz, once more fired by the vision of the new cottage and Emilia's welcoming face, broke into a gay snatch of song; then checked himself, with an apprehensive glance at the forward deck.

And again Lucena heard, feigning deafness. So perverse is memory—so difficult is it for the most tactful to tell which pressure soothes and which distresses—that he felt almost gratitude to Diaz for the song so carelessly chanced upon, and only pride kept him from ordering it repeated.

But the snapped verse rang insistently through his mind, and set itself to every sound of creak or ripple, as he watched Rocaverde rise higher and become distinct in form and color as they approached.

"From me, my absent one—" That was what Arria demanded—that he should separate himself still more completely from Estevan. A slight smile touched his lips; he was not coming home to submit to conditions or dictation. Yet, remembering Padre Jacinto's warning, he reluctantly acknowledged the decision that might be forced upon him, and regarded the island curiously.

The wind had brought a little relief from the heat; but when the ships dropped anchor at noon, the very ropes scorched the fingers that grasped them. As Lucena passed to the small boat, he caught Diaz, with ardent gaze, searching the bright crowd that filled the wharf.

"You are of the crew, Diaz," he said briefly, and saw the swarthy young face flush with surprise and pleasure as its owner sprang down the ladder.

Felipe, already in the boat, seized an instant when Lucena's head was turned away, and smiled mockingly up at his rival on the deck above. In the glance and the furious gesture which carried the other's hand to his belt, a challenge was given and accepted.

As always, the village had poured forth in greeting. Ruy de la Vega and the glittering train from the castle waited on the pier, and Rocaverde flaunted all its insolent prosperity in deference to its lord. Of what was happening across the mountain there was here no sign. But, to a ruler of men, nothing is more obvious than when his many-stringed instrument is out of tune; Lucena had not returned Don Ruy's salute before he knew that something was wrong.

Once before he had met this change in the care-free atmosphere of Rocaverde—this chill apprehension, while men avoided his eyes and left unspoken the thought uppermost in their minds. By that occasion he interpreted this, and imagined that he knew the explanation. As he received the reins of his horse from Don Bernardo, he noted, as confirmation of the opinion, the young officer's pallor and uneasiness. This place had usually been taken by Pedro Mirando, and the substitution did not please Lucena.

"Where is Mirando?" he questioned, glancing over the groups.

Don Bernardo was a native Rocaverdean, and evasion of the disagreeable query did not even occur to him.

"My lord, he is dead," he answered promptly, if unwillingly.

Lucena lifted his brows in some surprise, but inquired no further. It was sufficient that the man was not there to serve him.

With the clatter of the last departing rider, the wharf broke into joyous tumult. Emilia Diaz was already in her husband's arms; as the second boat came in from the Gaviota, Rosa Paredes stepped coolly from the crowd and walked into the embrace of the one-eared Valentino. There was a stupefied pause among the witnesses; then an outburst of mirth and applause.

The man on the dock and the man in the boat looked at each other; then Alberto tossed his knife viciously into the sea, and Felipe bent to offer his assisting hand for the landing.

CHAPTER XXV.

A LUCENA WAKES TO ANGER.

In the great arched hall of the castle, where the glowing walls and tinted col-

umns had set the scene for the drama of many a Lucena before this last Don Luís, he turned upon Ruy de la Vega, as he had once demanded an account of a dearer governor.

"Well, Don Ruy?" he asked imperiously. "What now?"

The old man faltered as he encountered the clear, hard glance.

"My lord, I—"

"Go on!"

"My lord, pardon; the *señora* can tell it better than I."

"It is not in Doña Soledad's charge that I left Rocaverde, but in yours."

"My lord, I return the island as it was left with me," he answered, not without dignity. "What the *señora* has consented to tell is—different."

Lucena's lips set in the old unpleasant curve.

"I can guess, De la Vega. You were ready enough to accuse Don Estevan before; this new consideration is a little out of place. However—Doña Soledad knows of my arrival?"

"Yes, my lord."

Lucena turned away, and took the direction of the east wing. That Estevan had attempted a second rebellion he did not doubt; nor that Arria would make a second effort to save him, by the old method. And Lucena's mood had never been so dangerous; the reaction had come, and he crossed the single step that lay between the grief of an hour before and anger as bitter.

In the upper hall he paused for an instant; then deliberately chose the route through the violet room. If Ruy de la Vega had been forced to bring Estevan to the castle, he would probably be here; if not—it was simply the shortest way to Doña Soledad's apartments. But the room was empty, and there could have been no greater evidence of the change in Lucena than his passing unmoved through the eloquent place.

His visit was already anticipated in the east wing. One of the attendants opened the door, and went out after admitting him. Lucena looked across the shaded room, and saw his mother seated in her armchair on the dais, quite alone. For the first time in his recollection the rows of demure women had been dismissed.

Doña Soledad was not a skilled student of character, but she augured no good from Lucena's expression as he bent his head to her hand.

"Don Ruy has told you?" she asked.

"He sent me to you. Apparently the news that awaits me is not amusing to tell. I regret that you have been troubled to assume this task, *señora;* for I can answer you that it will make no difference whether the story is told me by you, or by Don Ruy, or by any one else in Rocaverde. It is Estevan again?"

Doña Soledad folded her hands in her lap, latent hostility toward her son jarred into active dislike for the moment.

"Estevan is dying," she stated in her thin, precise voice.

To the physically strong, a shock comes with no cessation of consciousness—no relief in outcry. Lucena said nothing. His mother, knowing the race, cast down her eyes and waited in perfect silence. A bee blundered in at a window and circled the room, its baffled hum rising and falling through the stillness. Presently it found the opening again, and rushed tempestuously out, the sound dying away across the garden.

"What has happened?" asked Lucena at last.

"He fought a duel with Pedro Mirando—no one knows why. Of course, they must have had some secret understanding together, or Mirando would not have gone there. Evidently they quarreled, and Mirando was killed. Jean Perez brought the news two days ago, in the form of a message from Doña Floria." She stole a glance at the gray, impassive face and compressed her lips.

"You will be very much displeased, Luís, but I warned you not to leave the girl up there alone. She publicly sent word that she was betrothed to Estevan—I suppose they met in the woods, since you did not confine either—and demanded that Arria and I should go to the Quinta, bringing the physician."

"Rocaverde does me honor; I am not an officer of the Inquisition," he replied, in his low, bitter tone. "If he was wounded, every assistance should have been sent at once. *Señora,* I shall long be grateful to you and Ruy de la Vega. Arria is at the Quinta?"

"Arria is in the garden," responded Doña Soledad. "Pray remember, Luís, that you and yours have trained Rocaverde, and that the result is your own also."

Lucena might have retorted, with truth, that useless cruelty was not a trait of his house; but the reproach passed unheeded, almost unheard. He turned and went out to the sloping terraces. Doña Soledad looked after him with feelings of mingled relief and repugnance.

"And we were afraid to tell him!" she commented mentally. "I used to believe he loved Estevan, at least."

But the girl who rose at his approach and stood waiting beneath the almond tree was too much like him not to read better the composure a little too well maintained, which Doña Soledad had failed to understand.

There were no conventional greetings; opposite her Lucena stopped, and they looked at each other.

"Why are you here?" he demanded abruptly. "You are self-willed enough to follow your own path in my absence. Why have you not gone to him?"

Arria's violet eyes faced his.

"Because you wished me to stay here," she answered, her cool, slow voice at variance with the betraying color that deepened steadily.

"I? Since when have you begun to obey me?"

"Perhaps since Floria taught me her way."

Some of Lucena's difficult self-control slipped from him.

"Doña Floria has nothing to do with us, my cousin. Or are you about to tell me that you and she believed, with the rest of Rocaverde, that I wished Estevan to die of neglect—that I am capable of such brutality?"

"I do you no such wrong, and Floria watches for you as her one hope," she answered. "What she has taught me is humility. She loves Estevan, and has declared it to the whole island. He is disgraced—a prisoner—dying—unable even to give her his dishonored name; yet she asks only to go to him. This is the dainty child you laughed at the idea of loving. I know myself too proud, or too weak, ever to do what she has done. But you will lead me in no such paths. Luís, you asked me to be your wife; do you realize that there will soon be no obstacle between us, and through no fault of ours?"

The cry that broke from Lucena's lips was more of wrath than of love; the last barrier of restraint crumbled and went down.

"And you think I will step to happiness across Estevan's grave? That I will bear to see in your face the reflection of the other whose death is exchanged for it? Arria, you shall be my wife while he lives or never. By God's blood! I have kept him here for this—to die untended and deserted in his suffering! Come!"

The storm she had evoked, the movement that followed, were too violent and sudden for Arria to protest. Lucena flung his arm around her waist and bore her to the castle, with the swift ease of one leading a little child.

"Send for Padre Jacinto!" he ordered the stupefied Doña Soledad.

"He has gone to the Quinta. Luís—"

"Then the strange priest I brought home on the Aguila. Tell De la Vega. Lose not a moment."

Giddy, half fainting for the first time in her healthy young life, Arria rested unresistingly in Lucena's grasp, leaning against the dominant arm that held her. She was vaguely cognizant of the waiting-women, who had returned and now sat aghast in their places; she heard Doña Soledad's shocked questions, and the curt reply. The struggle she had predicted to Floria had come — and passed.

There was a slight commotion at the door, and a stranger in black was standing before her; Doña Soledad and the others had risen. Lucena gently released her, studying her with keen eyes; he knew quite well that she would make the necessary responses.

When it was over he kissed her, and the last antagonism between them shriveled and fell away.

"I am going to the Quinta," he said quietly. "Do you wish to come with me, my wife?"

"Yes," she answered, as quietly.

(To be continued.)